

Improving everyday journeys for women and girls

Dr Lucy Baker

Prifysgol Aberystwyth / Aberystwyth University



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Introduction

What

This guide is intended to help local authorities to increase the number of women and girls travelling by walking, wheeling, and cycling, Explicitly, by:

- Taking practical actions to improve their safety.
- Increasing their confidence and experience of these journeys.
- Building their engagement in design and consultation processes.

This has been done with sensitivity to women's needs and aims to address gender inequalities. We've undertaken and read existing research to ensure this guide promotes activities that work.

Feedback from women, girls, and local authorities is welcomed. We'll integrate this feedback into future versions of this guide.

Why

Globally, women generally walk more than men - on average by 23%¹ - reflecting lower access to car ownership and use, cost of alternative modes, and shorter journeys.² Women also use public transport more than men, which further increases their likelihood of walking.³

Women report higher levels of fear and anxiety on everyday journeys, however,⁴ and are more likely to experience sexual violence and harassment.⁵ Women and girls often avoid walking in isolated places, alone, and outside of daylight hours.⁶ Streets that score low in audits measuring a range of indicators for suitability of walking are used less by women than men.⁷ Girls walk, wheel or cycle to school less so than boys because of concern for their safety.⁸

Women report lower wayfinding confidence compared to men which can heighten their insecurity.⁹ Women's journeys frequently involve care responsibilities¹⁰ and multiple destinations,¹¹ yet transport systems and places rarely accommodate these needs and this deters some women from walking, wheeling, cycling.¹² Employment trips have been the focus of transport planning methods, developed and undertaken primarily by men leading to women's needs being overlooked in transport and the built environment¹³

In the UK, women are 50% less likely to cycle than men,¹⁴ deterred by masculinised cycling culture¹⁵ and traffic safety concerns, especially when travelling with children.¹⁶ While women respond positively to traffic-free routes, inadequate safe routes remain a significant barrier.¹⁷

How

Transport for Wales, the Welsh Government and Welsh universities, are working with local authorities to change the way people travel through targeted interventions that we know make a difference. This guide provides examples of approaches to consultation, design, governance, and engagement that can be implemented locally to promote walking, wheeling, and cycling for everyday journeys among women and girls.

It also sets out key messaging to help overcome barriers to walking, wheeling and cycling for women and girls. We will continue to update these case studies and tools as we better understand what works for women and girls in Wales.



Women and girls experience of travel is disproportionately shaped by actual and perceived safety risks.¹⁸

Safe and inclusive design can improve experiences, build confidence, reduce risk, and create equitable access to places by walking, wheeling and cycling.¹⁹

Engaging women and girls' leads to more inclusive, accessible and effective design outcomes.²⁰

Key approaches

Designing for women's changing needs

Women's mobility changes over the course of their lives, and approaches should consider the different needs of young girls, teenagers, women, and older women.

Girls are often concerned with traffic safety and personal security (girls are sexually harassed from a young age including by peer learners²¹).²² Features such as traffic calming, cycle lanes, pedestrian crossings, lighting, greenery, and mixed land-use, encourage independent active travel for short trips.²³ Girls and teenagers often perceive cycling as not 'cool', leading to lower cycling rates than boys.²⁴

In adulthood, escorting children is primarily undertaken by women.²⁵ Cycling enables family-time and healthy family lifestyles. However, poor infrastructure, driver behaviour and children's ability can make women feel vulnerable.²⁶ This particularly pertinent when accompanying disabled children.²⁷

Public places and routes can be promoted to families to collectively and safely walk, wheel, and cycle.²⁸ Incorporating family connection and play – with careful attention to safety and targeted communication to women – can improve the perception of walking, wheeling, and cycling. Family-focused events can also build confidence and make leisure cycling a more everyday occurrence.

In later life, women tend to stop driving sooner than men, meaning active travel and access to public transport is of particular relevance to older women.²⁹ Women in later life are more likely to become carers of adult dependents and their journey patterns reflect this such as accompanying relatives to medical appointments or delivering shopping.³⁰ Women in later life are also more prone to injury by falls compared to men and younger people.³¹ Local authorities should think about safe, traffic-free routes, accessible public transport, and clear communication about health and leisure benefits.

An intersectional approach

An intersectional approach recognises that women's experiences of mobility are shaped by overlapping factors such as race, religion, disability, sexuality and gender identity. For example, some women rely more on walking or public transport, while others face greater discrimination or violence because of visible identities.³² Inclusive design and decision making should reflect different experiences and needs in campaigns and infrastructure investment to ensure engagement and consultation is accessible for various groups of women and girls.

Representation matters - racialised and gendered stereotypes about who cycles can make women feel excluded or hyper-visible.³³ Promoting cycling as safe and enjoyable can help challenge its dominant masculine and racialised associations.³⁴ Walking, wheeling, cycling or bus and train buddies can assist in journey planning and confidence building.

Tools such as street design guidance, Active Travel Act guidance and Equality Impact Assessments ensure infrastructure (including temporary changes to it) is accessible for all users.³⁵

Gender budgeting

Gender budgeting means analysing budgets through a gender lens to ensure resources are allocated equitably. In active travel, this involves understanding how men and women use walking, wheeling, and cycling differently, and adjusting investment priorities accordingly.

Transport and public spaces should be equally accessible and non-discriminatory for everyone. Gender-responsive budgeting helps assess the equity impacts of financial decisions, identifying whether investments reduce or exacerbate inequalities.³⁶ Tools such as Equality Impact Assessments and cost-benefit analyses can support this process by ensuring that funding allocations and savings do not reinforce existing inequalities or produce new inequalities.

For more information on Equality Impact Assessment, see: [Gender Equality Impact Assessments: A Short Guide – Women’s Budget Group](#).

Women and girls remain underrepresented in transport planning, both professionally and within engagement processes.³⁷ Yet their needs and experiences differ from men’s. For example, women respond more positively than men to improved wayfinding information in public spaces as it enhances safety and increases confidence.³⁸ With gender-responsive budgeting, funds can be directed towards, for example, clearer wayfinding information that would improve women’s safety.

Gender disaggregated data should be collected to consider differentiation of the impact of any adjustments. New initiatives should use participatory design with diverse representation and could be supported by a working group with balanced gender representation to guide the process.

For more information on gender budgeting, see:

[The case for gender budgeting in active travel - Walk Wheel Cycle Trust](#)

[Gender Responsive Budgeting – Women’s Budget Group](#)



Personal and physical safety

Women's reluctance to walk, wheel and cycle often stems from real experiences of gender-based violence and a lack of trust in institutions such as the police, justice system, transport operators, and urban planners.³⁹

Safer walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure contributes significantly to transport-related equity and will encourage more women to travel actively.⁴⁰ Design features that reduce risk and contribute to women and girls feeling safer include good lighting, well-maintained infrastructure, clear sight lines, frequent entry and exit points, and routes with passive surveillance (for example, overlooked by homes, shops, or offices).⁴¹ The improved safety of routes and public transport should then be communicated to women.

Such design concepts also enable children to travel independently from an earlier age, reducing the time women need to spend travelling.⁴² Tactile maps and training on their use helps visually impaired and blind users to move through public spaces.⁴³

Local authorities and police forces could collaborate to support campaigns to build public trust through clear communication about how to report incidents and by demonstrating that reports are taken seriously. If adopting a zero-tolerance approach, consider how this will be embedded and enforced – for example, through specific actions, procedures or formal policy commitments.

[Greater Manchester's Safer Streets Programme](#) offers a useful example, with targeted interventions, improved reporting mechanisms and visible enforcement activity helping to build public confidence.

Considering care responsibilities

Women are more likely to 'trip chain' (making a series of linked journeys) based around school pick-ups, other caring duties, shopping, household needs and employment.⁴⁴ Centralising health clinics, schools, pharmacies, shops, nurseries and leisure facilities reduces distance, women's time and cost. It may increase take up of walking, wheeling and cycling for such journeys.⁴⁵

Child-care facilities could be located in transport hubs or near to transport interchanges to improve mobility and employment opportunities. Encouraging major employers to integrate creche services into their estates would have a similar effect.⁴⁶

Wayfinding could include signage and route information to facilitate travel to places that are relevant to care-related, domestic and leisure journeys. Those locations could be included in bus service routes as destinations and added to route timetables to assist women planning journeys efficiently.

Interventions that work

A Children and Young People's Plan for Grangetown and Llanishen, Cardiff⁴⁷

Grangetown Pavillion Youth Forum and Cardiff University collaborated to involve 150 young people in a plan to improve the Cardiff neighbourhood for children and young people.

The project:

- Found that girls and young women emphasise safety features (such as lighting of parks) and want more amenities like benches and pop-up food stalls in the parks, greenery, wildlife, places to play, take part in sports, and socialise.
- Highlights examples of what is important to young people in their communities and what they need to travel more independently, using a gender-sensitive approach.
- Makes suggestions of how to engage young people in design, diagnosing mobility concerns, and co-creating interventions.⁴⁸

See also [The Public Map Platform in Anglesey](#), a participatory design project involving young people and adults through digital mapping, storytelling, and collection of local data that will influence planning and policy.





Newtown and Llanllwchaiarn safety study

Following reports of personal safety concerns, Powys County Council is improving a section of the National Cycle Network 81 route between Llanllwchaiarn and Newtown. The project engaged with women and girls via workshops, online feedback, and in-person interviews to understand safety concerns. Women are involved in project delivery as researchers, designers, and engagement officers.

- Key concerns included poor lighting, limited access and exit points, antisocial behaviour, narrow paths, and overgrown vegetation. These insights informed preliminary designs and a “Safety Study Checklist.”
- Immediate improvements have been done with larger proposals integrated into future funding programmes.
- Outcomes will feed into a national toolkit to support wider implementation of personal safety improvements across Wales.

The project prioritises lived experience, using co-design to ensure solutions reflect women’s needs and capturing evidence for scalable best practice.

Increasing the number of women cycling

Interventions to encourage cycling for women and girls tend to be targeted to local or specific groups. For some ideas of what might work, see how:

- [Pedal Power](#) in Cardiff are getting women cycling.
- [Cycle Sisters](#) are encouraging more Muslim and ethnically diverse women to cycle.
- [Make Space for Girls](#) are ensuring parks are designed for girls and young women’s needs.
- [Women’s Safety Audit Pilot Project](#) are helping groups conduct safety audits.
- The [London Cycling Campaign](#) are getting women cycling in the capital.

Further reading

- Interventions found by the Transport Champions tackling Violence Against Women and Girls: [Findings from the transport safety for women and girls interventions scan - GOV.UK](#)

Endnotes

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